The shooting of Oriana Fallaci

Miss Fallaci, a frequent contributor to LOOK, *was severely wounded in Mexico City while covering the student uprising that reached a bloody climax on October 2.*

THE STUDENTS CALLED ME on Wednesday at my hotel in Mexico City and said there would be a big meeting at the Plaza of the Three Cultures at five o'clock. Earlier, I had talked with leaders of the strike committee, "We are fighting against police repression," they told me. "We are fighting for the rights of the peasants. We are becoming the conscience of Mexico."

I arrived at 4:45, and the square was almost full. I went to the third-floor terrace of the building where the student leaders speak, and was surprised to see so few there. One arrived who was very nervous and said he was late because armored cars and trucks full of soldiers were barring people from the Plaza.

The leaders had planned to announce a hunger strike, then march to a campus occupied by the army. But now they said, "*Companeros*, we are going to have a change of program. Nobody will go to the school because they are waiting to kill all of us. When this meeting is over, everybody will go home."

After the announcement, a girl of 17 or 18 with a voice like a little bird, said, "I want to ask that you remain peaceful." Everybody applauded. Then another said, "We want to show the government that we know other ways to fight. On Monday, we begin a hunger strike." At that moment, a helicopter appeared over the square, coming down, down, down. A few seconds later, it dropped two green flares into the middle of the crowd. I called out: "Boys, something bad is going to happen, they've got flares," and they said, "Aw, come on, you are not in Vietnam!" But, I said, "In Vietnam, when a helicopter drops flares, it's because they want to locate the place to bomb." Not three seconds later, we heard a great noise as troop carriers arrived and stationed themselves around the sides of the square. The soldiers jumped down with their machine guns and immediately started shooting. Not into the air, as you do to scare, but at the *people*. Just then, we noticed that on the roofs there were more soldiers with machine guns and automatic pistols. They had been hiding. I froze. Socrates, the boy with the microphone, was crying: "*Companeros*, don't run! Don't be frightened, it's a provocation! They want to frighten us. Don't run!"

The guns drowned out his voice. He cried again, "Don't run," and the guns began again. There were women jumping from the stairs and the walls with children in their arms. I had no idea of where to go, and suddenly I heard a great noise on the stairs. There was shooting, and we were surrounded by policemen in civilian dress. Each had a white glove or a handkerchief covering his left hand, so they could recognize each other. They jumped on the student leaders and on me. One of them took me by the hair and threw me against the wall. I hit my head, sagged and fell.

At that point, there was heavy firing from the soldiers on the ground, with rifles, machine guns, automatic pistols; machine guns from the roofs, and guns in the helicopter. Then the police ordered us to lie flat on our stomachs. I did. The only way you could protect yourself from the bullets coming from above was to nestle against the front wall of the terrace. So the police used this safe barrier, and put us, the arrested ones, along the opposite wall where we were open to the guns. We lay there for almost an hour. Each time we made a movement, they jerked their guns at us. It made me wildly nervous, because they had their fingers on the triggers. The barrel of one gun was not more than a foot from my head.

One student almost completely covered me for half an hour, until a policeman started yelling, "Arrested, separate!"

I had my purse with me, and wanted to put it on my head just to protect it from fragments. But whenever we made a move, they thrust the barrels of the rifles closer. Then they ordered me to lie there with my arms raised above my head.

I speak of terror in Vietnam, but in Vietnam and in any other war, during the shooting you can escape if you see a hole, a bunker or some place. Here, not only could you not escape—you couldn't *hide*. I could see bullets all around me hitting the terrace floor. I said, "Well, one will hit, one's got to hit."

Scared as I was by the police, I inched little by little and was able to move half a meter. All at once, I heard a great explosion and I recognized it from Vietnam, and it was the machine gun of the helicopter —I *know* it! It's a special noise. Then I felt a terrible thing like stones or knives—hitting me twice in the leg, and once in the back on the right side. If I had not moved that half a meter, I would have been hit in the head. I started yelling, first in Spanish, then in English: "Help, help, help!" Nobody paid attention. I had not told the police I was a journalist. It seemed to me unfair to say, "Save me, forget about them." But when I was hit, a German journalist started yelling, "Help that woman!" The policeman yelled back, "She's a *guerrillera*." The German said, "No, she's a European journalist; you'll get in trouble if you don't help her." They didn't do anything.

The blood was just coming through my jacket. Then I touched my leg—again blood. The pain increased, and a student started yelling, "She's dying, she's dying." Each time he said something, they moved the guns closer to our eyes. Only one policeman gestured humanely, saying "Be quiet, be quiet."

"But she's dying," the student said. He believed it, because by this time there was so much blood. Twice, I raised my head and cried out, then I passed out. It seems I came and went—came and went. The shooting began at 5:45. I was wounded about an hour later. I was there until 8:30 or later. Then, when the terrace was completely flooded with water because the pipes had been hit, a policeman crawled over to me and took my hair and dragged me along the terrace until we got to the stairs. He continued to pull me by the hair. Each time I hit a step, I started yelling like hell because it was like a knife going inside of me.

At the bottom of the stairs, someone turned me over on my back. I remember quite well that a hand reached down and took off my gold watch. Then I was put in a room that was flooded with water and already filled with wounded policemen. All this time, I had hold of a student. I said, "He's my translator, he's my colleague." I was trying to keep them from hurting him. I lay there 45 minutes. A policeman came, looked at me and said, "She's all right." I asked for an ambulance. They said the Colonel doesn't want an ambulance to come. I told them, "My Embassy knows I am here. If I do not go back, you will all be in trouble." After five or ten more minutes, I found myself on a stretcher. But that was not the end. While I was on it, we went out a sort of passageway where there were many, many students who had been arrested. They put the stretcher down under a big hole in the roof with dirty water rushing through it. And they placed me so the water hit my face. One student took off his pullover, threw it over my face and said, "Strength, Oriana." The soldiers finally came to put me in the ambulance. Later, at the hospital, a policeman asked me, "Name and last name?" "Age?" "What were you doing there?"

"Working," I answered.

"Agitator!"

"No, journalist."

Another came and went through the same thing. I think around eight or nine of them came until I said, "Stop asking questions, and call my Embassy immediately." They said no, and then I lost my temper and screamed: "First the Mexican police shoot me; second, the Mexican police steal my watch; third, the Mexican police deny me my right to call my Embassy." I was shrieking, although not as loud as I wanted because of the pain in my back. A nurse finally said, "I am going to do it." The people from the Embassy arrived almost two hours later . . . and during those two hours, I lay there bleeding on the floor.

At about one a.m., a doctor came, and without giving me any anesthesia poured alcohol into the big hole in the back of my leg. The hospital had made an X ray and announced that I had a superficial wound in my back. It was so superficial that the surgeon who finally treated it, in a different hospital, said the bullet was seven or eight inches deep!

My wounds were not the worst. There was a woman, young, who had lost half her face. They left her on the stretcher for two hours. There was a boy about 15 years old. Blood was pouring out of him, and nobody was doing a thing.

The doctors were not that bad, but they seemed helpless. They were frightened. Then three very touching things happened before I was taken away.

There were Indian women there, wounded, with their kids in their arms. They asked me, "*Periodista* [Journalist]*?*" I said "*Si.*" They held up their two fingers in a V, the students' sign of victory.

Then a nurse came to me and said, "Please tell the truth when you write." Next, a young doctor came and said, "Please, do write for us everything you have seen. Please, do write the truth for us."

ORIANA FALLACI